

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Ambassador Souheil Chammas of the Lebanese Peace Delegation

December 17, 1992

The President. Welcome, and my respects to people at home. And we're just delighted you're here at the White House. I think it's proper and fitting, and I'm very pleased you're here.

Q. Are you happy with the way these talks are going, Mr. President?

The President. You can answer, sure.

Ambassador Chammas. Maybe we would have wished that the peace talks go ahead at a larger pace. But I take this opportunity to express the deep gratitude and recognition of the Lebanese Government on behalf of my President, the Prime Minister, and the political leadership, as well as the people of Lebanon. We think the initiative of President Bush in holding the Madrid conference and initiating the peace process will in the end be an historic landmark. And time will prove that we're right. Those of us who have accepted to come and join the peace process came knowing in the end, regardless of the difficulties, it would reach ultimately its fruitful conclusions. And this would be good for the area, its people, and all the states there.

The President. A very good statement. A very good statement.

Q. Do you think the deportation of 400 Palestinians will disrupt the talks?

Ambassador Chammas. It will loom largely over the talks. And we expressly hope that President Bush, with his weight in the administration, will do what they think they can in order to have the Israeli Government rescind the decision, because in itself deportation is bad. And under the circumstances it will adversely affect the peace process, I regret to say. And if the news were to be correct that they could be deported to Lebanon, this will further aggravate an already grave situation in Lebanon. And I'm sure I will raise this with the President of the United States if President Bush would be kind enough to listen to me.

The President. And I look forward to—[inaudible]—having a good discussion. Thank you all very much.

Note: The President spoke at 10 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Ambassador Mowaffak Aloaf of the Syrian Peace Delegation

December 17, 1992

The President. We're glad you're here and look forward to hearing from you how you feel the peace process is going and all of that. We salute you for staying in the game and being at the negotiations. I want to assure you of our determination to try to bring these as far along as we can while we're here. And I'm confident that our successors will want to see this process actively and vigorously continued.

Ambassador Aloaf. Well, we are grateful very much, Mr. President, for receiving us. We consider this, really, as an indication of the great importance you attach to the

peace process, something where our people and our authorities are convinced very deeply of. And they already, I think, have expressed their appreciation for your efforts.

This is your peace initiative. If we are sorry that after 13 months of this peace process we are still without real progress, it is because we know how much effort and how much—especially Secretary Baker—time, I think—has spent a lot of energy and efforts under your leadership in order to make this peace process the hopeful end for

a conflict which has lasted for more than half a century—before and after.

The President. Well, we can talk in a little more detail now as to how you see it and what you think we might be doing. But I, again, I say welcome.

Q. Do you believe the process has not succeeded, Mr. President?

The President. He doesn't remember that I don't take questions at these photo opportunities. But I'm glad and appreciate your—

Q. Are you boycotting the talks today, Mr. Ambassador?

Ambassador Aloaf. We are not boycotting the peace process. We are protesting against what's happening today when more than 400 people, human beings, sitting blindfolded, their hands tied behind their back, in buses, waiting for a decision about something which is, to begin with, really not acceptable in neither an international nor in humanitarian roles. So we shall tell our

Israeli counterpart how we feel about that. And we believe that this is not really helpful to the peace process.

Q. But you will remain in the peace process.

Ambassador Aloaf. We are in the peace process because we believe in the seriousness of the United States of America. We consider this invitation by President Bush to us as an indication of that importance and also as a message to the successor of President Bush, President-elect Clinton, a message that the peace process is important not only to the parties but also to the United States of America and to the world.

The President. I can assure you it is. And we'll see where we go. But we'll discuss that item here now as soon as we have our private talks.

Note: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the Middle East Peace Talks

December 17, 1992

The President met today with Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian-Palestinian, and Israeli delegations involved in the bilateral negotiations of the Middle East peace process. He did so to emphasize the continuing value of the process begun in Madrid, one that aims at a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

The President commended the parties for their sustained commitment to this process and for the progress they have achieved. It is significant that all of the parties have engaged seriously on the key issues of land, peace, and security. Substantial achievements are within reach if the parties make additional efforts to address the legitimate concerns of their negotiating partners.

The actions and statements of the parties away from the table are no less important than the negotiations themselves. Both Arabs and Israelis need to elaborate their

visions of peace. This will build public support for the negotiating process. They also need to form a concerted voice calling for an end to all forms of violence and avoid reactions such as deportations that risk complicating the search for peace.

Peace between Israel and its neighbors has never been more achievable. A way has been created whereby the people of the Middle East can escape the wars that have too often defined the region's history. Making peace a reality through these negotiations is the only way to frustrate those who would sabotage the peace process by violence.

The U.S. role as catalyst, honest broker, and driving force was instrumental in achieving the historic breakthrough at Madrid. The United States remains an essential participant in the search for peace, willing to assist actively in making the negotiations succeed.